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Abstract:

Much has been said about the ethics of requiring a submission to include a set number of citations/references from the journal to which the submission is sent. This article accepts that it is unethical to require a set number, but takes the position that there are several ethical and necessary reasons for editors to require additional relevant citations/references. The arguments presented are from the perspective of a journal editor in chief.

Keywords: authorship, knowledge management, body of knowledge, IS ethics

I. INTRODUCTION

The question has been asked if it is ethical for a journal editor in chief or publisher to require a set number of citations and references from that journal be included in papers published by the journal. As the founding and current editor in chief of the *International Journal of Knowledge Management* and co-founder and co-editor in chief of the *International Journal of Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management*, I do not believe it ethical to ever require a set number of citations and references from my journals be included in any article published. To my knowledge, our publisher, IGI Global, has also never required this. In addition, I am the Knowledge Management Systems Track co-chair for the Hawaii International Conference for System Sciences. That said, I also do not want it to be interpreted that it is never ethical for an editor in chief or track chair to request citations and references be added to an article. I do not agree with the consensus of the comments that the citations and references used are solely up to the author(s) and that reviewers and editors need to tread a fine line. I do agree that it is not ethical to suggest or require citations and references to perhaps increase readership or citation counts. However, under some circumstances I believe it is ethical for reviewers or editors to suggest or require citations and references. These are the topics of this paper:

- Ethical concerns with plagiarism or other author credit issues
- Reviewers are published in the topic of the paper
- Building a body of knowledge
- Selective or old citations and references
- Showing the author is familiar with the journal

The following sections elaborate on these issues.

II. ETHICAL CONCERNS WITH PLAGIARISM OR OTHER AUTHOR CREDIT ISSUES

I have had only two instances over five years in which I required the author to include a citation and reference. Both cases involved articles written by an author who had published previously on the topic with a co-author. In both cases the co-author was not included in the current article and I was concerned that ideas from the previous, co-authored article were not being given adequate credit. To resolve the issue I required citation and reference to the previous article as a condition of publication. I took this action because, to me, it was the right thing to do. To be honest, I thought this circumstance was unusual. It occurred only twice in 24 issues, but in conversations I've had with colleagues it appears that such occurrences may be more common than I thought. As an editor in chief I consider resolving this problem one of the required functions of the job, ensuring the quality of the research and ensuring that credit is given where credit is due.

I have also encountered a few incidents where submissions included material from other published sources that was not properly cited or referenced. I have seen this situation in both conference and journal submissions. In submissions where this occurs I do not like to determine if the omission was intentional or accidental. I assume the author(s) made a mistake, point the error out to them, and require that the proper citations and references be used.

An interesting example of potential plagiarism is when I have knowledge of accepted articles waiting for publication. There is no way the authors would have this knowledge. In these cases I provide advance knowledge of a publication so that the author(s) can properly cite and reference it. While this issue may not seem important at the time of publication, a year or even years later other researchers may wonder or question why an article failed to cite or reference an article that clearly should have been included in the article's literature review. I also consider this part of my job. In summary, I have found failure to cite to be a fairly uncommon occurrence for my journals. The reason may be that the time to publication is generally less than a year. It may be much more common for journals that take two years or longer to publication after acceptance.

A final example is when the submission is the expansion of a conference paper but fails to reference the conference or the conference paper. This is becoming quite common as ICIS, AMCIS, HICSS,[1] and other leading IS conferences require greater quality in their conference papers. In many cases, these conference papers are nearly

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[1] ICIS is the International Conference on Information Systems held annually in December; AMCIS is the Americas Conference on Information Systems held annually in August; HICSS is the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences held annually in January in Hawaii.

ready for journal publication and many journals, mine included, fast track quality conference papers. I am not familiar with all conferences but I am with HICSS. The HICSS requirement is that the conference paper have a 20 percent change in content and acknowledge that the paper was previously published in the HICSS proceedings. Many authors are not familiar with these requirements. As editor in chief I must require the author(s) to acknowledge their previous conference publication and to tell me how they met their 20 percent change. This may not be a pure self-reference requirement, but it is one more reason that author(s) are sometimes required to add a reference/acknowledgement.

III. REVIEWERS ARE PUBLISHED IN THE TOPIC OF THE PAPER

Another concern from the survey is that reviewers and editors require inclusion of citations/references from their own work. Many authors perceive this requirement is imposed to improve citation/impact factors for the reviewers or editors. I will not say that reviewers or editors never suggest their own work just to improve their citation/impact factors, but I will suggest that this phenomenon is probably not as prevalent as authors believe.

Speaking for my reviewers, associate editors (AEs), and myself, our suggestions are based on our being active researchers in the area the submission is addressing. Like many editors I strive to assign reviewers and AEs who are actively publishing in the submission's topic. My experience is that these reviewers and AEs are more current in the appropriate literature and thus do a more thorough review. That they may suggest their own work is usually because they believe their work is relevant to the paper being reviewed. In addition, I have seen reviewers and AEs, and I have done it myself, recommend articles because these articles contained several references that could be relevant to the paper being refereed. In no case did these recommendations require the author(s) to cite/reference the suggested articles. I do understand how authors can perceive that the reviewers, AEs, and editor are suggesting their own work in order to improve their citation/impact factors, but it really is not meant this way. I learned to ensure that it is clear in the review which articles are being requested for inclusion in the submission (and why) and which articles are being recommended as good sources of further information. It is my hope that an outcome of this debate on requiring citations/references does NOT result in a fear by reviewers, AEs, and editors that they will be perceived as unethical should they require or recommend their own work as long as that work is relevant and needed by the submission. It is part of improving the submission's quality during a thorough review.

IV. BUILDING A BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

The main reason I suggest relevant citations/references is to build a body of knowledge for my disciplines. Knowledge management and crisis response and management are relatively young academic disciplines. My journals' mission statements include reference to assisting in the building of a body of knowledge and establishing the foundations of their discipline. Kuhn [1996] lists several criteria that define a discipline, including the formation of specialized journals and an accepted body of knowledge for group members to build upon, eliminating having to build their field anew with each paper.

My journals are specialized to specific fields (knowledge management and crisis response) and I take it as part of the responsibility of the journal's editorial review board to build the field's body of knowledge. What this means is that I strive to get authors to build upon each other's work. I have stated publicly that if I never read another definition of knowledge I will be happy. This stand of course is a little extreme and I don't really mean it. However, it illustrates that I expect that we agree on a definition and use it and that we no longer need to define knowledge in every paper written on knowledge management. The same can be said for other basic definitions similar to knowledge management. This view is also consistent with Keene and Tan [2007].

The result the author(s) see of this mission is that we do require that citations/references be used that are relevant to the article and that are consistent with commonly accepted concepts. I agree that this point is possibly contentious because it can change the focus of a submission. An example would be a submission that focuses on explicit and tacit knowledge. Many papers recognize that knowledge rarely, if ever, is purely tacit or explicit. Rather, it is a mixture of both that varies with the individual using the knowledge. I now require submissions that focus on knowledge to at least address this knowledge continuum concept instead of just the tacit and explicit endpoints. Is this ethical?

Few papers today are required to define the term "information system." We are comfortable with this definition being in our body of knowledge and do not require it in every paper. Since our mission is to build the body of knowledge and to move the discipline to the point where we have commonly accepted definitions, I feel it quite appropriate that I guide authors to this goal. I agree that it is up to the author(s) to do select citations/references that reflect the body of knowledge of the discipline their submission addresses. It is, however, also the role of the editorial review board of the journal to ensure that the selected citations/references reflect of the body of knowledge. For example, I receive many submissions that select/reference only citations that support the submitter's point of view

and ignore others that do not. The role of the editorial review board is to identify those citations/references that may not support the submission but reflective the current body of knowledge. I consider the real strength of the peer review process to be the establishment and continued development of a discipline's body of knowledge.

V. SELECTIVE SOURCES OR OLD CITATIONS AND REFERENCES

Some submissions focus their citation/reference on selective sources. By this I mean that the majority of citations/references come from a specific journal or a limited group of journals. My journals require that these submissions expand their scope of citations/references to include appropriate sources from other sources. If the reviewers, AEs, or editor can find relevant sources from other journals that the submission's author(s) refuse to add, I do consider this a legitimate reason to be a basis for rejecting the submission. My basis for rejection is building a body of knowledge and trying to get the author(s) to avoid tunnel vision in their view of relevant literature.

Sometimes journals tend to take on the personality or bias of their editor, AEs, and/or reviewers. This view isn't necessarily bad and may be natural. It is a good reason to ensure a submission's literature review encompasses multiple sources. Another issue with selective referencing arises when a submission contains only older references. This occurrence is not common but it happens often enough to warrant mentioning.

I have received several submissions in which all of the citations/references are over two years old, as well as a few submissions in which they are all over five years old. If I can tell through a quick review of the submission that there are current relevant citations/references I return the submission to the author(s) with direction to review the current literature before resubmitting. I am leery of considering this behavior an ethical issue because I realize how a submission may have all older references: either the submission was rejected by another journal and the author(s) are submitting it to a more appropriate journal, the submission is an extract from the author(s)' dissertation where the literature review was possibly completed several years before the article was written, or the submission is the product of a long term research project where again, the literature review was done early in the project. However, I consider this a lax effort on the part of the submission's author(s) because being an editor, AE, or reviewer is a voluntary job. Wasting the time of a journal's board on such an obvious failing is unconscionable and should not be done.

VI. SHOWING THE AUTHOR IS FAMILIAR WITH THE JOURNAL

The basis of the survey was a publisher requiring an author to include at least five references from a journal's published articles. Almost all of the respondents agree that it is unethical to require a submission to include a set number of citations/references from a journal. However, I also noticed that many editors, while agreeing a specific required number of citations/references was unethical, thought that requiring relevant articles from the journal being submitted too was appropriate. I agree with this position.

I am amazed by every submission that does not include a citation/reference from my journal. My first thought is why? Are articles from my journal not good enough to cite/reference? I then wonder if the author(s) even bothered to look at the journal and if they know whether their submission fits the journal. I have had a handful of submissions to the International Journal of Knowledge Management that never mentioned knowledge management in the article. Some have not even mentioned knowledge or organizational memory, organizational learning, or other terms relevant to knowledge management. Ultimately I wonder if these authors understand what the knowledge management discipline is about.

Submissions are first screened to see if they are worth reviewing by a panel of volunteers with finite time to devote to the process. If they are sent out for review, results are mixed. Some reviewers are offended by the submission, question my use of their time, and ask me if the author(s) expect them to do their literature review for them. Other reviewers do a good job. Most, however, end up recommending summary articles for the author(s) to review to find relevant citations/references. In all cases the private, for the editor only, comments that I get back make it quite clear that reviewers and AEs feel taken advantage of by authors that do not make an attempt to understand the journal they are submitting to.

This issue tends to be associated with younger or newer researchers. I understand the pressures of publishing on those working for tenure or to keep their positions, but I also think a strong statement needs to be made that journal editors, AEs, and reviewers are not paid. While journals need submissions, it is not an authors' right to put the burden of their getting published onto the editor. I hope that authors will show a little more respect. A way of doing this is by at least taking the time to review the journal they are submitting too, including relevant citations/references, and including terms relevant to the topic of the journal.

I do realize that there will be submissions that are cutting edge and innovative and that there will be no relevant citations/references in the journal. I recognize these submissions when they come in and, of course, I understand they may not include citations/references from the journal. However, the author(s) need to make the effort to tie their submission to the purpose/mission of the journal.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

While the survey finds a consensus that it is not ethical for a journal or publisher to require a set number of citations/ references from the journal in each submission, there are good reasons for editors to require relevant citations/ references. This paper outlines several of the issues that drive editors to require inclusion of citations/ references. It is my hope that this article will further stimulate discussion that will remove any potential ethical stigma to editors who do require additional relevant citations/references for the reasons stated.

To reiterate, acceptable reasons for requiring additional relevant citations/references are:

- Ethical concerns with plagiarism or other author credit issues
- Reviewers are published in the topic of the paper
- Building a body of knowledge
- Selective or old citations and references
- Showing the author is familiar with the journal

I further hope that this article starts discussions of the responsibilities of authors to do their due diligence in the preparation of their submissions.

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Murray E. Jennex is associate professor of Information and Decision Systems at San Diego State University, editor in chief of the *International Journal of Knowledge Management* and co-editor in chief of the *International Journal of Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management*. Dr. Jennex specializes in knowledge management, system analysis and design, IS security, e-commerce, and organizational effectiveness. Dr. Jennex serves as the Knowledge Management Systems Track co-chair at the Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences. He is the author of over 100 journal articles, book chapters, and conference proceedings on knowledge management, end user computing, international information systems, organizational memory systems, ecommerce, security, and software outsourcing. He holds a B.A. in chemistry and physics from William Jewell College, an M.B.A. and an M.S. in software engineering from National University, an M.S. in telecommunications management and a Ph.D. in information systems from the Claremont Graduate University. Dr. Jennex is also a registered professional mechanical engineer in the state of California, a Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP), and a Certified Secure Software Lifecycle Professional (CSSLP).

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